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SUBJECT: SENIOR GDRC FIGURES ARGUE OVER WHO GETS TO MUZZLE MEDIA

REF: A. 04 KINSHASA 2327

[1](#)B. 04 KINSHASA 2279

[1](#)C. KINSHASA 127

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: The DRC's Minister of Press and Information, Henri Mova Sakanyi, issued a decree January 18 barring many radio and television stations from broadcasting political news and call-in shows. In protest, members of the Association of Congolese Community Radio Stations (ARCO) suspended all broadcasting for one day, on February 8. END SUMMARY.

Minister Gags Some Media

[1](#)2. (SBU) On January 18, the Minister of Press and Information issued a decree criticizing the "persistent excesses" of the Congolese media. The decree noted that the person of the Chief of State is "sacred" and that authorities will "rigorously sanction" any sort of media attack on him. The decree also says the authorities will sanction any broadcast inciting hatred, violence, and disturbances, or spreading slander. The decree specifically prohibits religious and community stations from broadcasting political news and from broadcasting call-in shows.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The governors of Katanga (PPRD), East Kasai (MLC) and West Kasai (PPRD) provinces have issued their own orders enforcing this decree. According to the president of ARCO, these governors have asked their local branches of the national intelligence service to enforce their orders and the minister's decree. Consequently, religious and community radio stations in these provinces have ceased broadcasting political news and programs. In protest, the approximately three dozen member stations of ARCO suspended all broadcasting for one day, February 8. (Note: They reportedly resumed broadcasting on February 9. End Note.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) As of February 9, religious and community stations appeared to be ignoring Mova's decree. Although the decree does not affect the larger, private stations in Kinshasa since they are not religious or community stations, they have joined in the criticism. Groups such as Journalists in Danger (JED) and the National Union of the Congolese Press (UNPC) have also criticized the decree and called on Mova to annul his "anti-democratic decision."

Media Authority Challenges Minister but Warns Offenders

[1](#)5. (SBU) Modeste Mutinga, president of the High Media Authority (HAM, a public body independent of the Ministry of Press and Information), declared in a public statement on February 8 that the minister had exceeded his authority and intervened in a matter over which the HAM should have final say. Mutinga criticized former Transport Minister Olengankhoy (without naming him) for "dragging the President's image through the mud," and blamed Vice President Bemba (again, without naming him) for having had the indecency to broadcast Olengankhoy's message. The HAM president asked all politicians to respect the code of conduct they freely signed with members of the media, under HAM auspices. He also reminded listeners that according to a 1969 law still on the books, those who broadcast speeches which defame the Chief of State can face ten to fifteen years in prison. (Note: He cited Article 1 of Ordonnance-Loi No. 300, dated 16 December 1969. End Note.) It is also a crime to disturb public order, violate public morality, undermine national unity, harm another's personal dignity, or weaken the Congo's territorial integrity.

COMMENT

[1](#)6. (SBU) Interestingly enough, Mutinga appears to be trying to stake out a more independent position for himself, and has engaged in his own efforts to control the Congolese media (ref B). In any case, recent actions by Mova, Mutinga and others constitute a discouraging trend of officials attempting to exert greater control over the media. END COMMENT.

[1](#)7. (U) Bujumbura minimize considered.
MEECE